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15 June 1983

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Possible Soviet Military Activity in the Caribbean Basin

The USSR is seeking to expand its influence in the Caribbean and Central America and to weaken and isolate the US by two broad types of military activity. At the same time, Moscow hopes these activities will cause new military problems and diversions for American armed forces in the region.

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One type of activity is consolidating and protecting pro-Soviet Marxist regimes in Cuba and Nicaragua by increasing their military strength. Current emphasis is being put on arms deliveries to the Sandinistas. By supporting these two countries as well as Grenada--and potentially Suriname--as bastions of Marxism, the USSR probably expects to undermine US power and authority in the region. It also sees them as the nucleus for revolutionary expansion in the region.

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The other, lower priority activity is increasing Moscow's own military role. Secure Marxist regimes in the Caribbean Basin enable the USSR to conduct air reconnaissance activity and facilitate naval visits to the region. These serve some limited Soviet military interests and convey a political sense of Soviet military presence, showing that the US is not the exclusive factor there. Such regimes also offer the potential for the stationing of Soviet-controlled weapons systems, which could complicate US defense planning.

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Both types of Soviet military activity may be viewed by Moscow as costing relatively little while increasing the cost to the US of guarding the Caribbean. As instability in the region has begun to preoccupy the US more deeply, the USSR has probably become convinced that the value of its own involvement has grown. It has welcomed the diversion of US political energies and military and economic resources from other international arenas which it views as more vital to its interests.

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In order to make Cuba a more secure base in the region, the USSR could:

- Modernize and augment the Soviet brigade in Cuba, whose main assignment still seems to be local security.
- Deploy the SA-5 to Cuba, either manned by its own or Cuban forces. This would considerably extend the range of Cuban air defenses and in wartime would require the US to destroy the missiles.

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-- Continue upgrading Cuban naval forces. This would force the US to consider providing some protection for its shipping in the region.

-- As part of improving Cuban coastal defenses, provide the new SSC-3 system, which consists of two Styx missiles on a mobile platform. This would add another layer of protection for Cuban coastal areas. [REDACTED]

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The USSR is also bolstering the Sandinista position in order to turn Nicaragua into a secure base from which to project Marxism into other Central American countries. It is up to now avoiding any direct combat role there, however, while providing mostly military support equipment and letting surrogates deliver major combat weapons. Cuba is being utilized to play the key role in trying to consolidate the Sandinista regime against guerrilla challenges. [REDACTED]

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If Moscow comes to feel that the Sandinistas are secure enough to risk tying Soviet prestige to them directly, then the USSR could support them by:

-- Delivering weapons directly to Nicaragua, and sending significant numbers of Soviet advisors with them. These weapons could include the kind of air and naval defense systems that have been supplied to Cuba.

-- Stationing a Soviet brigade in Nicaragua similar to the one in Cuba to provide local security. [REDACTED]

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The USSR might increase its naval visits, begin using Cuban port facilities for logistic support, or seek access to facilities elsewhere in the region. Such activities could include:

-- Increased naval deployments in the region. Up to now Soviet naval forces have visited the Caribbean only occasionally. In times of a major military confrontation with the US, Moscow is likely to

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husband its naval resources for use in areas more vital to the USSR's own security and less vulnerable to US power. But, short of such a major confrontation, Moscow might hope that deployment in the Caribbean would force the US to devote more attention to watching the Soviets there.

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Pro-Soviet nations in the Caribbean Basin would make it possible for the USSR to take more extreme measures that would pose even more substantial military problems for the US. However, we think that Moscow is unlikely to try to turn them into forward bases for Soviet-controlled offensive weapons systems. Such deployments would involve the Soviets in a major confrontation with the US, forcing Moscow to choose between backing down in the face of superior US regional conventional forces or escalating its response to a global strategic scale. [REDACTED]

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Soviet attempts to establish forward bases in the region could include:

- Deploying land-based ballistic missile systems, such as the SS-20 or the SS-23, to Cuba, Nicaragua, or Suriname. This would pose serious military problems for the US because of the missile's shorter flight time, the fact that US early warning capabilities would have to be increased, and the fact that it could cover most time-urgent US targets such as national command centers and SAC air bases.
- Deploying submarines equipped with cruise missiles to the region, possibly basing them in Cuba. This would force the US to increase our ASW resources in the region.
- Using these countries as bases for Backfire bombers. [REDACTED]

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While an augmentation of the USSR's strategic posture, none of these moves would add decisively to the already great Soviet potential for attacking the US. They would be more to distract American attention and resources from areas of more vital Soviet security concern. They might also be conceived of by Moscow as bargaining chips to seek the withdrawal of some US forces from areas close to the USSR. [REDACTED]

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